



State opposes federal plan to store mercury at Hawthorne

Geoff dornan

Appeal Capitol Bureau, gdornan@nevadaappeal.com

February 4, 2006

Nevada officials say they haven't given up the fight to block U.S. Defense Department plans to move 3,000 metric tons of mercury to the Hawthorne Ammunition Depot.

Federal officials announced earlier this week they have decided to transfer the mercury now stored in three states to the U.S. Army's Hawthorne depot. The stockpiles were created in the 1950s in case of war but now are no longer needed.

Keith Munro, chief of staff to Gov. Kenny Guinn, said the fight isn't new, it's been going on for about three years and the state is reviewing its options to prevent the shipment of mercury to Nevada.

He was joined by Bob Loux, head of the state's efforts to block Yucca Mountain.

"We're working on it," said Loux, adding the state's Department of Conservation and Natural Resources is taking the lead.

Allen Biaggi, director of the conservation department, said he wrote a letter to the federal government opposing the plan in 2003 when it was proposed.

"The state of Nevada is opposed to the consolidation and storage of the strategic mercury stockpile anywhere in Nevada," the letter states. "Nevada has contributed more than its fair share to national defense."

He said Nevada is home to millions of cubic feet of low-level nuclear waste at the Nevada Test Site, there are several bombing ranges in the state contaminated with unexploded ordinance "not likely to ever be cleaned up for public use," millions of tons of munitions are stored at Hawthorne and the state is the only proposed site in the nation for high-level nuclear waste at Yucca Mountain.

"The federal government's policy appears to be that Nevada is a wasteland for disposal and other undesirable activities," he said.

Biaggi said he opposes moving the mercury here for the same reasons Rep. Mike Ferguson, R-N.J., applauded the decision to move it out of New Jersey - the metal is a dangerous toxin which causes severe brain damage in humans.

And he said consolidating 2,617 metric tons of mercury from New Jersey along with 557 tons from New Haven, Ind., and 1,262 tons from Warren, Ohio, in Nevada appears to be a permanent solution in the eyes of the Pentagon.

Biaggi said it's an unfair burden, especially when federal officials still haven't dealt with long-term storage issues for the existing munitions stored at Hawthorne.

"Nevada should not be burdened with the ultimate treatment, storage and disposal of this material," he said.

-- Contact reporter Geoff Dornan at gdornan@nevadaappeal.com or 687-8750.

[BACK](#) 